

Tobacco Product Sampling

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Tobacco Facts

The free distribution (sampling) of tobacco products and associated items is clearly a problem in Washington. Despite limitations on tobacco advertising and sampling activities imposed by the Master Settlement Agreement in 1998, the tobacco industry continues to aggressively promote its products in our state. Tobacco samples provide a low-cost or no-cost initiation that encourages kids to experiment at early ages.

The Federal Trade Commission reported that in 1999, the first year after the Master Settlement Agreement between the States and the tobacco companies, those tobacco companies increased their spending on free samples by 133 percent.

Sampling activity often occurs in venues frequented by adolescents and children, such as fairgrounds, local mini-marts and gas stations, rock concerts, sporting events, rodeos, and shopping malls. Activity in these places increases the chances that kids will get tobacco. In recent months, sampling events have increased in and around college campuses and communities, including in fraternities and sororities.

SOME KEY FACTS

In Washington State, sampling is now a key strategy in the marketing of all tobacco products and promotional items.

The Federal Trade Commission reports that advertising expenditures among the largest tobacco manufacturers increased by 22 percent from nearly \$7 billion in 1998 to \$8 billion in 1999 and nearly \$10 billion in 2001. (In Washington this translates into \$174 million dollars spent on advertising in 2001.)

- The Federal Trade Commission further identified that tobacco industry spending on sample giveaways increased by 134 percent (to \$34 million) from 1998 to 1999.
- Data collected by the Department of Health indicate that sampling events have been on the rise in Washington for the past nine years. Overall, a twenty-fold (2,500 percent) increase has occurred: from 44 events in 1994 to 1,134 events in 2001.
- In Washington several tobacco companies are scheduling sampling activities in stores for the entire time of open business hours (i.e., 8 a.m. – 11 p.m.). With few officers or public health officials, it has quickly become impossible to adequately monitor these events.

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The state Attorneys General (in 1994) and the Surgeon General of the United States (in 2000) have identified free samples of tobacco as "encouraging experimentation at an early age."

In 2002 the National Cancer Institute reported that tobacco advertising and promotional activities are important catalysts in getting kids to start using tobacco.

- Ensuring samplers are providing adequate security and identification procedures at crowded and hectic events such as rock concerts and sporting events is just as difficult.
- College communities are among those that have been targeted for sampling promotions. Significant clusters of sampling events have been seen in and around Washington's college campuses during the academic year.
- Verifying age requirements and ensuring distributor compliance with the law is even more difficult through the mail or the Internet. Effective control in these areas beyond the resources of law enforcement agencies.

In 1998 the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that promotional activities influenced previously non-susceptible youth to experiment with tobacco.

- The distribution of tobacco products at these events is not the only problem. The give-away of promotional items such as t-shirts, CD cases, backpacks, cigarette tins, and other items are clearly designed to appeal to young people. These items put the tobacco brand logos into the view and hands of the public further strengthening the legitimacy of these products in the eyes of youth.

In 1994 the Working Group of State Attorneys General recommended a ban on the distribution of free tobacco products.

- It is clear that the industry uses this sampling as a method to sell the appeal of tobacco. For example, despite having the only sampling ban in Washington, King County has seen 117 promotional events so far in 2002. Although distribution of tobacco or coupons is not permitted in King County, it can be argued that the effect is the same.

CONTROLLING THE PROBLEM

As long as sampling is permitted in Washington, youth will continue to get free or cheap tobacco and success in controlling the problem will be severely limited. Despite efforts by the Department of Health, local health jurisdictions, Liquor Control Board, and other partners to increase public awareness regarding the issue, sampling continues to increase exponentially.

One option to remedy this situation is to allow local government to enact sampling policies that address the specific needs of their communities. Another might be the implementation of a statewide ban on sampling activity as recommended by the Working Group of State Attorneys General and other public health experts. The elimination of sampling activity will significantly impact efforts to improve the health of our youth and our communities.

For more information on tobacco prevention and control:

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/tobacco/>